

THE ACQUISITION AND RISE OF BOMBAY

BY SIR PATRICK CADELL

WHEN THE ISLAND of Bombay was included as an item in the dowry of the Portuguese Princess Catherine on her marriage to King Charles II, Lord Clarendon, who as Lord High Chancellor had a principal share in the negotiation for the marriage, is alleged to have referred to "the Island of Bombay with the towns and castles thereon, which are within a little distance from Brazil". This assertion may fit in with the belief that has been sometimes expressed that Great Britain acquired her Empire in a fit of absence of mind. It can, however, have no foundation in fact. There was a great deal of give and take in the Contract for the marriage. Portugal received a body of English troops to protect her from the attacks of the Dutch; England relinquished any claim upon Ceylon, an undertaking faithfully observed, though it did not prevent the Dutch from ousting the Portuguese from that Island. For this assistance England received an adequate return. Portugal resigned her claim to Tangier, and gave up her holding in Bombay. The value of the harbour of Bombay had already been recognized by the Directors of the East India Company in London, and by its factors at Surat. It is absurd to suppose that Clarendon was not fully informed of the situation and the value of this important item in the bargain. Apart from any other source of information he had before him the letter discussed below from an impartial observer. It would be too much to suggest that the letter had any great influence on the decision. It is, however, interesting to have so clear an idea of the potential value of the proposed acquisition.

No mention is made, so far as is known, of the writer of the letter in any of the early books or records about the West Coast of India. In his first letter to Lord Clarendon, like his other letters without date, but probably written fairly early in 1661, the writer says that for the past nine years he had "traced foreign countries as being unwilling to draw in the ayre of my native ayle least I should be taynted among the rest with disloyalties". It may be assumed that he was Royalist in his sympathies, though it is unlikely that he had fought in the Civil War on the King's side. If he had done so,

he would have mentioned it in support of his request for employment. He writes that he had first travelled in occidental parts and had then resolved to visit oriental parts and for six years had spent his time there "to inform my judgment of their nature and fertility, the habits and religion of the people, the manner of their trafficke, their policy in governing their kingdoms and subduing their enemies".

In the course of this ambitious programme he had "raigned Madagascar, Johanna, Zelon, Pegu, Syam, Sumatra, Java, some part of Chyna, the coast of Coromandel, the Bay of Bengal, the coast of India from Cape Comorin to the River Indus". He had then returned overland from Ormuz to Aleppo, through Persia, Media, Kurdistan, Assyria, Mesopotamia, and Syria. Then "plowing up the billows of the Mediterranean" he had sailed by way of Cyprus to Leghorn, and onwards to England. He says that if in any way serviceable to His Majesty by relating what he knows he will with alacrity make response to all questions.

He ends with a postscript, "I brought several toys from these places, but was robbed at Bolonia in Italy, yet some escaped which I shall presume to present to your Lordship, which I humbly crave for acceptance."

A second letter ran as follows: "Not long since I presumed to acquaint your Lordship that for many years I have eaten my bread in foraigne soyles, endeavouring to accomplish myself with languages to make myself more capable. The truth on it is, travel expense hath eaten up patrimony. Harde it is in my opinion (if I might be a competent judge) for one who hath lived happily abroad, to suffer hunger in that place where he first drew his breath."

He then asks for employment with many apologies and "with height of modestie and humileation", either by sea or land, at home or abroad.

As with his previous letter, he adds a postscript. "I fervently beg upon my bended knees your Lordship's acceptance of this humble present. Had I not been robbed at Bolonia, it would have been worth presenting. I have a dammisk simmeter which, if your Honour pleased to accept it, would be gladly presented."

Evidently Page had then an interview with the Chancellor as he writes in a third letter: "Your honour was graciously pleased to declare this morning that you could not see what to say unto me in regard to my supplication in generall. Truly I supposed that

it would be an act too sublime and altogether unbecoming my present low condition to particularize any employment." He then says that, if offered the "lowest sphear at Court, yet, with a constant anxiety I shall embrace it. My Lord, I have not bread to eat". He ends up, "with very humble prayers for your Lordship's prosperous success in all your undertakings, and, when tyme shall be no more, that you may receive the reward of the Saints."

Whether these good wishes, for this world and the next, had any tangible reward is not recorded, but it would appear that the Chancellor asked for a description of Bombay and its harbour, and the result was the account that follows. It is on the whole admirably clear. It should, however, be remembered that Bombay was only one of a group of seven islands separated by arms and inlets of the sea, though passage on foot across them was generally possible at some point at low tide. Of these seven, only two, Bombay and Mahim, were of considerable size. Ultimately by the building up of banks, and the recovery of "drowned lands", the seven islands became one. At the period of the account, however, it is not always easy to decide whether references are to the whole group of islands, or only to the township (Portuguese *Caçabe* from Hindustani *Kasba*) of Bombay.

The letter runs as follows :—

My Lord,

In compliance with your commands I demonstrate that August the third, in the yeare 1660, I arrived at Bumbay upon the coast of India or rather Industan, for so the country is cald.

Bumbay is dirived from the fish Bumbaline, a fish all jelly, soe that fresh, it is not palitable, but being salted & dryed in the sunn, becomes the first and best fish in the orientall partes (of which vast quantities are taken in this bay).

The Pole Articke is elevated 19 deg : & 8.

The bay is verry deepe, and hath an island in it, hy land, and a mile in circuit, soe that by reason of this island the raging waves of Neptune are subdued, and the bay made an excellent harbour. It is verry large, soe that a 1000 sayle of ships may ride land locked, and as bould, for we never had less than 7 fathom of water at our entrance, and when in, and at anchor, 9. The land in the country opposite to it is verry remarkable, for it makes in great hamoucks, and barne land, as the mariners tearme it.

The island in the bay is not habited, neither any building upon it,

but capable of receiving either, and if a fort or castle was erected it would conduce much to the strength of the place. In the head of the bay there is a great stone house, 'twas built by Don Diego de Monzant, a Portugal hidalgo, a person of greate esteeme among that nacion. He raised the fabrick for his one defence against the fury of the Dutch, and hath 5 or 6 small gunns mounted upon his house for now & then the Dutch men of warr would enter the bay. A flights shoote from this house there is a towne, but all poore cottages, not any house of noate, for none but fishermen habits it, they take their fish from September to Aprill, which is their summer, for from Aprill to September not a boate stirs, but are all hald up upon the shore and thacthed with the leaves of toddy trees to preserve them from the vyolent stormes that fall in May, June, & July.

The people of the place are Gentues, except a few rice Christians (as they call them), some that have bin baptized by the Portingalls, wch they alow a quantitie of rice per mensem to encourage others to subscribe obedience to the name of Christ. The land all about it very firtle, yealding a good encrease to the industrious husbandmen, haveing many plaines comodious for sowing there graine. It affordes wheate, rice, and doll, a graine not unlike our fetch, yt is verry harty, they break it in quarters, and boyle it among there rice.

The feilds are full of cattell, viz., cows, sheepe, goates, the gardings and orchards laden with frutes, as oranges, lemons, lymes, jamboos, guavas, grapes, citrons, melons, both water & musk, pine aples, pumgranets & many other sortes, so that in my opinion it is the best & delightfulest place upon that coaste, and I often wondred that our platts, as well as the Dutch, was soe sylent of it. There is a river that runs from Bumbay to Basseine, a great Portingall citty 7 leagues distant, and all the way the land firtle, and divers greate houses of the Portingalls are erected, and some small townes cituated upon the river on both sides. The place is convenient for the building of ships, for either they may build to lanch, in regard of the greate ebbing & flowing, or els make docks; and as for good timber, in order there too, that cannot be wanting, for betweene Basseine & Damaun, I have passed a whole day in a wood. The country for 25 or 30 leagues, is in the hands of the Portingalls, and in every greate towne, either of Gentoos or Mores, there is a greate Portingall who they call Senor Capataine, wch keepes them in subjection, and receives yearly halfe the earth's increase.

The place lys verry comodious for trafficke, & is much safer for shipping then Surrat, for that being an open roade, and haveing a greate barr at the entrance, ships come often to detriment, so that undoubtedly, if Bumbay was once habited, and castles built for the ships safty, it would quickly become the mart.

I have presumed to present your lordship with so large a discourse in regarde I was ignorant of what perticular you desired to be informed. If I have not fully deleniated the nature of the place let your honor be pleased to condescend soe low as to make further proposals. I shall readily subscribe to make responce. I humbly crave your lordships favorable construction in this opusculum and supplicate your honor to rest assured that if in this, or any thing els, I may be servisable to his Majestie, I have obtained the end of my travels. Let me once more presume to fix my hand to what I ever did protest, that is a loyall subject to his prince; and one that breathes fervently after that honor to be esteemed one of your lordships meanest servants.

From my chamber
in Fetter Lane
London.

John Page

It must not be supposed that the value of the sheltered harbour of Bombay had not been previously perceived. The Portuguese had for long had the mastery of the sea along the western coast. The first English ship had come to Surat in 1608, and their factory was established in 1612, but freedom of passage was not obtained till naval battles had been won against greatly superior Portuguese forces in 1612 and 1614. In 1622, the English and Portuguese ships had driven the Persians from Ormuz, thus opening up the Persian Gulf for commerce. The factory at Surat, however, had many disadvantages. It was subject to the close rivalry of the Dutch Factory, and the efforts of the French Company to establish itself. It was subject also to the exactions of the Mahomedan Viceroy of the Mogul Emperor at Ahmedabad, and even to those of the Emperor himself. It suffered from the disadvantages set out in Page's letter, of being situated on the banks of a difficult river, up which ships could not pass, necessitating transhipment at the mouth of the river in an inferior roadstead. It is hardly surprising therefore that Bombay should have been viewed with covetous eyes.

In 1625 the Court of Directors in London had proposed that the

Company should take Bombay. In 1626 the English Factors at Surat had proposed to the Dutch at that place that they should unite in attacking Bombay and should divide it between themselves. The attack was duly made in October of that year. The Castle and Great House were taken and burnt, but no effort was made to retain and divide the land. In 1640, Bombay was again mentioned as the best place along the western coast of India.

In 1652 the Factors at Surat recommended that it should be purchased from the Portuguese, while in 1654 the Directors in London drew the attention of the Lord Protector Cromwell to the advantages of the place. It is not surprising that, when the marriage treaty of Charles II provided that the King of England should defend and protect the subjects of the King of Portugal, the cession of Bombay to the English Crown should be suggested.

John Page's description of Bombay may be annotated as follows. Though his derivation of the name of Bombay from the fish which he calls Bumbaline is incorrect, it is interesting as the fish is still well known in Bombay and its odour, in the dried form of Bombay Duck, may still linger in the nostrils of old residents of the city. It has the distinction of being the origin of the nickname long applied by the English of the other Presidencies to their brethren of Bombay. Though now known as Bommelo the form bumbelo survived till Maria Graham's book of 1810. She calls it by that name and adds, quite correctly, that it was eaten at breakfast with kedgaree. It has also the distinction of being mentioned in Boswell's Tour to the Hebrides.

Page did not fall into the commoner error of taking the name of the Island to be a corruption of the Portuguese "buon bahia", meaning a "good bay". The city is still known to the inhabitants of the surrounding country as Mumbai, which is taken to be derived from Maha Amba Devi, "the great goddess Amba," the Goddess Parvati, whose temple long existed in Bombay.

The island mentioned in the Bay must be that known as Butcher's Island. Though cattle were kept upon it in later days, and a (probably mythical) person, Robin the Butcher, is mentioned, the vernacular name was the Island of the Patecas, or water-melons. It is shown as Pitachoes Island in Fryer's map of 1672. Even this name is believed to be a corruption of Bhatiche Bet, the "low lying Island". The land beyond it consists of various Islands, including Puri, known to the Portuguese and to modern inhabitants as Elephanta

because of the stone elephant previously erected upon it, and now preserved in Bombay. It and the other islands at the back of the bay are certainly "hummocky". The meaning of "barne land as the sailors terme it" is not known.

The Island of Bombay had by Royal Patent, signed by the Viceroy at Goa, in 1572, been granted to the De Silva family. It had passed through female heiresses to other families and when the English obtained the Island was in the possession of Donna Ignês de Miranda, widow of Don Roderigo de Monçant, and known as *Senhora da Ilha*, the lady of the Island. Page writes that the Great House on the Island had been built by Don Diego de Monzant, a Portuguese Hidalgo of great esteem. This may be a small error on his part, or the Don may still have been alive at the time of his visit, but the correctness of the surname is evidence that Page must have visited the place.

The "great house" was probably on the site of the later Arsenal, and just behind the existing Town Hall in Elphonstone Circle. The "poore town, a flight's shoote from the great house" must be Mazagon, the Fish village, then and long afterwards, occupied by fishermen. As regards the population, there were in 1634, with a total population of some thousands, only eleven Portuguese families on the Island. Most of the land had passed into the hands of the Jesuits and other religious Orders, who had attempted to convert the inhabitants by force, in consequence of which the better classes, such as the Brahmans, had fled from the Island. The remainder had the choice of becoming "rice-Christians" or running the risk of persecution.

Most of the labouring class are stated to have been bred to arms. They were a Kanarese speaking people who had come up the Coast from the South. They were known as Bhandaris, a name now confined to the caste whose main occupation was the cultivation and tapping of Toddy Palm trees, but the name itself seems likely to have been derived from a Kanarese word meaning "warriors". When the English occupied the Island they formed a Bhandari Militia which lasted through the next century. In 1676, little more than ten years after the English occupation began, when a Portuguese attack upon Mahim was threatened, the Bhandaris turned out with a strength of four hundred men. When the Portuguese handed over Bombay their Indian soldiers seem only to have numbered seventy. The religious policy had greatly reduced the population of the

Island. In 1629 the Archbishop of Goa had told the Viceroy that the Jesuits had been the greatest enemies of the State. The Portuguese had no doubt about the serious consequences of the loss of Bombay. The Viceroy, de Mello de Castro, wrote to the King of Portugal, "India will be lost on the day on which the English nation is settled in Bombay."

As the local authorities could not prevent the Treaty, they did their best to make occupation by the English as difficult as possible. Sir Abraham Shipman had raised a regiment of four companies in England in 1662 for service in India. When these arrived in Bombay in 1664, the Portuguese Governor refused to allow them to land, on the pretext that Shipman himself was not with them, although it was represented that the men were dying daily. When Shipman arrived a few weeks later, landing was again refused, because he was not specifically mentioned in the documents. He had to go with his men to the uninhabited Island of Angediva, south of Goa. The graves of many of them can still be seen as shapeless mounds on that desolate island. Small wonder that Pepys wrote in his Diary in May, 1663: "the Portuguese have chous'd of Bombay." It required a further order from the King of Portugal in August of that year to compel the Viceroy to conform to the Treaty.

When the English were finally able to land in Bombay in 1664, Shipman had himself died at Anjediva. Only 114 soldiers survived out of the 500 that had arrived at Bombay, with one solitary officer, Ensign John Thorne, who may truly be regarded as the first regular officer of the Bombay Army.

The Treaty provided that the Port and Island of Bombay should be handed over with all the rights, profits, territories, and appurtenances belonging there unto. With a set of Islands separated by small inlets of the sea, there was much opportunity for dispute. One Humphrey Cooke, who had come out as Secretary to Shipman, was acting as Governor in his place. As the Portuguese Viceroy complained that he had known Cooke as a grocer in Lisbon, the latter had probably been chosen because of his knowledge of Portuguese. He had to yield to the Portuguese on various points, for which he was censured both by the Factors at Surat and by the Directors at home. It would not appear, however, that any other course was open to him. He deserves full credit for the acquisition of Mahim which, as before mentioned, was larger than the actual

Bombay Island, and contained a considerable town. Finding that the arm of the sea which separated Mahim from Bombay was fordable at low tide, he marched across and took possession of it, to the great indignation of the Portuguese, but apparently in accordance with the Treaty.

Though Cooke was afterwards dismissed by the East India Company for dishonest practices, he must be given the credit for accomplishing the English occupation of Bombay.